

# History Is a Dance of Life

By Paul Wellstone

*Senator Paul Wellstone, Democrat of Minnesota, died on October 25. This article was adapted from the keynote address Senator Wellstone delivered on January 9, 1999, at the ninetieth anniversary party for The Progressive magazine.*

**W**henever I'm speaking in schools, I always say to the students, "The future will not belong to those who are content with the present. The future will not belong to cynics and people who sit on the sidelines. The future will belong to

JOEFF DAVIS



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I didn't bob or weave."**

people who have passion and are willing to work hard to make this country better."

When I ran, I didn't bob or weave on any progressive issues.

I said I was opposed to privatizing Social Security. I said I was for living wage jobs.

I said I was for labor law reform—that people should have the right to organize and bargain collectively so they can make a decent living and care for their children.

I said I was a strong environmentalist.

I said I was for Medicare for all.

I said I was for investing in the health, and skills, and intellect, and character of children.

And we won a big victory on progressive politics. Most of the people in cafés don't care about left, right, or center. They care whether the politics you represent speaks to the concerns and circumstances of their lives. That is the center. That is what most people

believe in. We shouldn't give any ground on that.

If every two years our politics are based on what some pollster tells us are the key hot button issues to get the swing vote, then we don't really represent all that much. And what we need to challenge is this downsized politics, which just invites cynicism. This is not a good politics. It is no wonder that we have a huge hole in the electorate.

People are so focused on how to earn a decent living. People are so focused on how to do well by their kids. People are so focused on health care and on affordable child care. And they want reform. They want to see a government they can believe in. And there's a lot of goodness in people. They believe in human rights. They believe in the environment.

So we should step up to the plate, the progressive community, and I will just highlight a few ways we can do that.

First, we ought to put clean money, clean election reform, at the top of the agenda. Get the big money out, and let the people back in. We ought to seize the clean money, clean election initiative that passed in Massachusetts and Arizona and take it all around the country and push as long and as hard as we can to restore democracy in America. Make reform a huge issue!

And second of all, we need to put on the table a plebiscite about children in America. We are still being told that we should accept the fact that one out of every four children under the age of three is growing up poor, and one out of every two children of color is growing up poor. Children are the most poverty-stricken group in our country. This is a betrayal of our heritage. It is a national disgrace.

And third of all—and I could do a ten of all—now we have forty-four million who don't have health insurance, and we have another forty-four million who are underinsured, and everywhere I go people are talking about health care. It's staring them in the face. The insurance industry took universal health care coverage off the table. As progressives, we're going to put it back on the table, and fight for universal health care coverage in this country. It's a political majority issue. It's the right thing to do. It's what we stand for.

History is a dance of life. We have celebrated the past tonight, we've talked of the challenges of the present, and now what we have to do is build the future. ♦